

## Physician Suicides Reported by Media in the Last Decade in Turkey

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### Dear Editor,

In recent years, physician suicides have created public debate and are being reflected in the media frequently. Considering the challenging medical education which starts after central examinations, compulsory service, serious responsibilities of the profession, preparation for the medical speciality examination which is one of the most difficult examinations in the world, and the residency period that involves both education and working; suicides of physicians deserves to be investigated.

All news on national and local media and internet sites between 01/01/2011 and 31/12/2020 was searched using the key word “physician suicide”. The news items related to the suicide of medical students, retired physicians and physicians who were not active were excluded.

Of the 39 physicians who committed suicide, 16 (41%) worked in surgical branches, 11 (28.2%) in internal medical branches, 11 (18.2%) in family healthcare centers or as general practitioners in hospitals, and 1 (2.6%) in basic medical sciences. 8 (20.5%) of them were residents. The suicide methods were reported as oral or intravenous drug overdose in 11 (28.2%) cases, jumping from height in 9 (24.3%), firearms in 8 (20.5%), hanging in 6 (15.4%), and other or combined methods in 3 (5.4%), unknown in 2. While 12 of the physician suicides were actualized between 2011–2015, 27 of them were between 2016–2020. It is noteworthy that the physician suicide rate in 2019 was higher than the general suicide rate of the society (According to TUIK data approximate general suicide rate in Turkey per 100000:4.12 in 2019 and according to our data rate of physician suicide per 100000:4.97 in 2019.) (1). Previous studies have also reported higher suicide risk for physicians than both the general population and other highly educated groups (2, 3).

The reasons for the physician suicides may be assumed as the difficult education period, continuous working under a high-risk, and high-stress workload, physical fatigue and burnout syndrome. There is a serious need for preventative measures for the suicide of physicians. The risk of suicide can be reduced with the elimination of all the factors leading to burnout syndrome (mobbing, violence, etc.) for physicians and the provision of easy access to better working conditions, social and mental health support

### Highlights

- In recent years, physician suicides is often reflected in the media.
- The vast majority (41%) of the physicians were working in the surgical medicine branches.
- The most commonly used suicide method (28.2%) was taking oral or intravenous drug overdose.

The main limitation of this study is that it is based on data broadcasted in media. Therefore, the data in this study based on media news should not be accepted as real statistical data, but just a slice of the data.

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